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ABSTRACT

At Mercer County Community College (New Jersey) an experimental learning resources center and a new curriculum in the social sciences were developed having primary objectives of: (1) keeping more minority-group students in school, (2) reducing their withdrawal rate, (3) developing assessment techniques accommodating inner-city populations, (4) developing relevant, purposeful curricula for center-city students, (5) improving minority-students instruction, and (6) initially targeting four tasks that would develop or identify: (a) model remediation programs for high-risk students, (b) curricula and teaching techniques for use with minority-poverty students, (c) new experimental programs designed to change and improve educational patterns for minority-poverty students, and (d) research necessary for the effective evaluation of the experimental programs. The particular approach advocated for the experimental instructional system was based on the following: (1) students' egos must be involved in their work to be successful, (2) multiple instructional methods are the most successful, (3) instruction must center on contemporary issues, (4) basic information must be presented, (5) irrelevance must be countered, (6) the model system must be replicable, (7) academic and social aspects should be emphasized, (8) model city neighborhood liaison should be stressed, (9) ghetto problem sensors must be built in, and (10) assessment methods relevant to the students should be used. An outline of the program is included. (AL)

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AN EXPERIMENTAL LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER AND A NEW CURRICULUM IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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AN EXPERIMENTAL LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER
AND
A NEW CURRICULUM IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

This proposal describes a Learning Resources Center and the development of an experimental instructional system utilizing a broad based social science course specifically designed for students from the intracity Trenton population.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

Learning Resources Center

The Learning Resources Center would develop a multi-media approach to learning the basic literacy skills. The Learning Resources Center's primary objectives are:

1) to increase, significantly, the number of minority group members from Trenton who enter Mercer County Community College (MCCC) and who are retained by the community college.
2) to reduce, significantly, the appalling withdrawal rate of minority students at the community college level.
3) to develop assessment techniques that accommodate the inner city population.
4) to develop more relevant and purposeful curricula for students from center city.
5) to improve the effectiveness of teaching minority students.

In the belief that curriculum improvement and teaching are central to the development of other components the center is initially targeted to a four-fold task.

1) To develop or to identify model programs of remediation for those high risk students who enter MCCC.
2) To identify successful curricula and teaching techniques developed on behalf of minority-poverty students; and to give widest currency for their use at MCCC.
3) To develop, as needed, new experimental programs designed to change and improve educational patterns for minority-poverty students; and to make every effort to have those programs integrated in the regular college curriculum.
4) To conduct the research necessary for the effective evaluation of those experimental programs.

A Learning System

The learning system would present an integrated approach to the broad fields represented by the social sciences including anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, economics and political science; in-puts from the discussions of history and geography would also be structured when appropriate. If the initial course is successful, it would provide the model for a wider based skills approach.

The particular approach advocated for the system is based on several defensible propositions:

1) Community college students must become ego involved in their academic work if they are to be successful. Regardless of the strength of their academic skills involvement comes best through active participation in all phases of a learning situation. The traditional read-lecture-test approach to the social sciences is not effective in the setting of the community college, particularly in working with students who may be weak in academic skills and have limited academic motivation.

2) A multi-media approach is sound since students tend to make better learning progress when all avenues of learning are utilized. Multiple instructional methods will be more successful since the evidence suggests that a variety of learning patterns exists among ethnic groups.

3) The social sciences must be structured around contemporary issues which are of paramount interest to students. Traditional kinds of information can then be presented within that context. The integrating construction used to tie all the social science areas together must be meaningful to the students.

4) The material presented must cover basic information which will equip the student for further work in the social sciences; but, this information must be presented in ways accessible to all students even though some may be in academic skills. This can be done through visual and sound techniques as well as regulated reading levels. The reading level can be controlled without diluting the information presented. The content will function as a motivating technique to develop the interest in reading and communicating essential to learning.
5) The system will effectively counter the complaint of minority and poverty groups who contend that the irrelevance of many of the institutional offerings inhibit their existence. The course would provide for both the pragmatism of daily inner city existence and the schoolsmanship necessary for performance in college courses.
6) The system, if successful, could be viewed as a model for future efforts to help minority students gain access to higher education.
7) It would attenuate the remedial aspect and emphasize the academic and social component.

8) The project will create a meaningful academic program which will be available to residents of Trenton's Model City Neighborhood, and parallel the efforts of that program.

9) The course will contain built-in sensitivities to the minority experience, with particular sensitivity to the problems peculiar to life in the intercity ghetto. It will not only be relevant to this experience, but will also stress academic skill and accomplishment.

10) It will attempt to develop and utilize assessment methods relevant to the students to whom they are applied and to the goals of the program. The evaluative criteria will contain a true effort at accountability for those people for whom education has been least accountable.

Virtually all specialists in the area of human growth and development agree that one of the major tasks in the development of mental ability is the establishment of one's identity. The implications of this for members of any minority group is overpowering. Concerned with the question of "What can I become?" they are really saying, "Who am I? How did I get the way I am? Where am I headed? How am I going to get there?"

These natural concerns which are common to all people can furnish the ideal approach to the integrated study of the social sciences. Each area can be looked at from the standpoint of how it helps to answer each of these questions. The study of such a course naturally involves the student since it concerns the very core of his being. Hopefully, the course of study will provide the direction needed to find tentative answers to those key questions; and finally, once he is involved in study, he will also absorb ancillary learnings provided by the materials themselves.

The "Who am I?" construct will also provide continuous opportunities for behavioral responses demanded as part of this learning system. As the student searches for answers to his own problems and for his own identity, he is not only examining himself but the diverse areas of society as well. It may well provide an ideal answer for community colleges which are confronted by frustating and baffling problems of motivating and educating students who remain in the system not because of their interest and ability to learn but because of social pressures.

OUTLINE

The following outline shows the major areas to be introduced by the system.

A Systems Approach to the Social Sciences

I. Introduction to the Social Sciences

1. Crises in Contemporary Society. What kind of a mess am I in? What are the major pressures on me? What crises in society affect me directly? Am I really aware of how these crises affect me and my interests?

2. Methodology and Contribution of the Social Sciences. How can the social sciences help me? How are they relevant to my real needs and concerns? What types of problems do the social sciences deal with? Can I use this methodology to help myself? Might there be a career for me in one of these fields?

II. Contemporary Society: Framework and Setting

3. Culture: Its Nature and Role. What is culture? What can a study of culture tell me about myself? What can it tell me about where I came from?

4. Culture: Its Function and Transmission. What effect does culture have on me? How is the culture in society passed on from one generation to another? What effect has this process had on me and the way I think and act?

5. American Cultures and Subcultures. What are the major earmarks of the culture in which I live? Am I a member of a subculture? Is there a youth culture? Is there a gap in the transmission of culture from one generation to another in America? How can I understand better subcultures in American society?

6. Culture and Social Change. What changes do I wish to see in American culture? American society? Is rapid change possible? Does the transmission of culture prevent rapid social change? How can I help bring about changes I feel are necessary?

III. Contemporary Society: Organization and Structure

7. Population: Growth and Mobility. How does population growth affect me? Do I have a responsibility in this area? How does population shift to urban areas affect me? Should I become a part of this shift? What problems can I expect to face if I move from place to place in American society?

8. Social Organization: Urban & Rural Communities; Social Stratification. How does my life style differ from that of those living in a different type of community? What are the major problems of my community? Benefits? Should I go somewhere else? What social class do I belong to? Can I move up? What effects does my class have on me?

9. Human Groups: Ethnic and Racial. What groups do I belong to? What effects do these groups have on me? What are the characteristics of my group? How do these characteristics differ from other groups? What relationships between groups are involved? What effects do these groups have on American society?

10. Human Groups: Small Group Dynamics. What small groups am I member of? What do we know about the way small groups behave? Does my behavior change in a small group? What are the characteristics of an effectively functioning small group? Do small groups work better with democratic or autocratic leadership? How can I be most effective as a small group leader or member?

11. Human Groups: The Family. What are the special characteristics of the family as the basic small group in American society? What roles are played in the family? What is my particular family role? Is my role changing? What problems will I face in establishing my own family group?

12. Education. What is the role of education in America today? What are the major problems facing American education? What effect has my past school experience had on me? What are my present educational goals? Are my educational plans realistic in light of a rapidly changing society and work structure? How can education prepare people better for the next few decades?

IV. Contemporary Society: The Role of the Individual

13. Growing Up in America. What is the usual pattern of human growth and development from birth through adolescence? What problems have I encountered in the process of growing up? How did I overcome them? What problems will my children face? How can adults best assist children in overcoming their problems?

14. Individual Psychological Adjustment. Is there such a thing as "normal" behavior? How do people see themselves and their world? What is my self concept? Is it realistic? Can I change it? Do I perceive my situation realistically? What mechanisms do I use to support and extend my self concept?

15. Deviance and Social Pressures. What types of behavior are considered "deviant" by society in general? What laws govern these behaviors? What social pressures? What are my attitudes toward deviant behavior? What social problems are caused both as a result of deviant behavior and resulting social pressures?

16. Juvenile Delinquency, Drugs, and Crime. To what extent are these problems prevalent in American society? What are their causes? What can I do to avoid these problems and help prevent their occurrence? Where can people seek help? What kinds of help are available? What reforms in these areas are needed?

17. Personal Philosophy and Morality. What values do I accept? Is my system of values consistent? Where did I get my values? Do I believe that men are free? Am I free to guide my own destiny? Or am I shaped by other events and causes?

18. Religion. What part does my religion play in American society? In my group? In my life? What ideas are various religions based on? Am I tolerant in my views on various religions and those who practice them? What is the relationship between church and state in America? What place does religion have in education?

V. Contemporary Society: Economic Organization and Structure

19. The Nature of Economics and Competing Economic Systems. What is the importance of economics to me? How can it help me plan my future? Where do I stand in the American economic system? Do I receive my fair share of economic goods? How can I improve my situation? What is the American system? How does it work? What alternatives are available? What is the best system?

20. The Problem of Economic Stability. How does economic instability affect me? What are the nature and causes of inflation and recession? How does each of these affect me? How can I defend myself against economic disaster? How can the economy be stabilized? What is the significance of the stock market?

21. Labor-Management Relations and Roles. What are the roles played in the economy by labor and management? Where do I fit into this picture? Which represents my interests? What are the functions of labor union? Strikes? How are corporations organized and managed?

22. The Problem of Poverty Amid Abundance. How much poverty exists in America? By whose definition? Am I in this category? If so, how can I break out of it? Must there be poverty in America? Why does poverty exist in the midst of great wealth? Can poverty be eliminated in America? How does poverty affect me if I am not poor?

23. Ecology, the Consumer, and the Economy. Who is responsible for looking out for the environment and the consumer? Am I adequately protected? What can I do to help in these areas? What will it cost to clean up the environment in America? Where will the money come from?

VI. Contemporary Society: American Political Organization

24. The Role of Government: Who Rules Best? What are the proper functions of government? What difference does it make to me who rules? What are the different alternative forms of government? What would each mean in terms of my own life?

25. The American Model of Democracy: The Constitution and the Supreme Court. What's in the Constitution? How does it affect my life? What guarantees are there for me in the Constitution? What is the function of the Supreme Court? Does it afford me any protection for my basic rights? What recent decisions have had a direct bearing on me?

26. The American Model of Democracy: Congress and the Presidency. What does Congress do? How does it operate? Does it represent my thinking and the wishes of my group? Who represents me? What recent actions by Congress affected me most directly? How is a president chosen? Do I have a real voice? What are the roles of the president?

27. The American Model of Democracy: State and Local Government. What functions do state constitutions serve? What are the functions of state and local government? How is my state organized? What type of local government do I have? How does it work? Does it serve my needs effectively? Is it close to the people? What effect does it

have on me? What are the major problems faced by local governments as far as I'm concerned?

28. The American Model of Democracy: Political Parties and Interest Groups. What functions do political parties and interest groups have? What are their differences? How can I affect what goes on in government most effectively? What is the value of political participation? How can I participate? What will it mean to me? What parties or interest groups most closely represent my own interests? Which oppose my interests? Should I try to work within or outside of the established political system?

VII. Contemporary Society: International Politics

29. The World Community and the United Nations. Why are various countries in competition with each other? How am I affected by what happens in other parts of the world? How are they affected by what happens here? What is the function of the UN? Why should I support it? What are my attitudes toward the UN and other countries based on?

30. American Foreign Policy. What are America's goals in international politics? Can we go it alone? What are our major foreign policies? How do these affect me? What role should the U.S. play in the future? What place should war have in the future? Can I influence foreign policy? How is it made? Should those who fight the wars have a stronger voice in decisions?

VIII. Contemporary Society: The Search for Identity in a World of Change

31. The Problem of Violence in America. How can I understand and to some degree control the rapid changes occurring in society? What is my role in this period of change? Helping to lead in a certain direction for the change? Opposing change? Will social change occur gradually? Or is America approaching a violent change? What might be the direction of a violent change? Is violence a part of American life? Is it increasing? How is it affecting me?

32. Who Am I? Having looked at myself from the viewpoint of all the social sciences, do I know who I really am? What are my goals, interests, abilities, potentials, plans, values, etc? Do I have a plan by which I can get where I want to go? How can the social sciences continue to help me?

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

The success of the Learning Resources Center is tied to the Center's ability to purchase programed learning materials. Programed learning is basic to the operant conditioning principles and is concerned with structuring the information in a manner so that students can unavoidably make correct responses. Materials emphasize the intrinsic rewards that motivate students by allowing the student to be successful. A broad spectrum of these materials is essential to the Center's success. These materials, coupled with the experimental curriculum developed by the Center, will be selected and designed to provide assurance: (1) that students will be more readily motivated to learn material that is meaningful; (2) that students can retain more information and acquire more skills if the material is sequentially presented.

FUTURE COMPONENTS

Serious thought will be devoted to the adoption of the Learning System to Computer Assisted Instruction. Once the functional model is operative, this type of instruction offers many advantages over programed texts, since it can respond and make instant branching decisions on the basis of student responses. Attention will also be directed to Computer Based Instructional Management Systems which seem to have the potential for providing each student with an optimum set of educational experiences. Since CBIM specifies behavioral change, higher degrees of competence and concept formation, the Learning Systems in Social Sciences could easily be dovetailed into a CBIMS. However, serious development of this combined capability depends on the initial success in the evaluation of the primary system.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Educational Testing Service will design and implement an accountability study of the first experimental curriculum developed by the Learning Resources Center. This study would determine:

(1) if this curriculum serves the students for which it was created.

(2) if the modes of measurement used in the program actually assessed the student's academic ability.

(3) if the learning system which involves a multitude of media and methods accomplishes its goals and objectives.

(4) if academic achievement significantly correlates with future economic status and benefits.

(5) if there is a significant transfer of what has been studied to solving personal and social problems faced by an intracity resident.

This study is vital to the success of the second phase of this project. Programs have been amply funded for curriculum development, but little or no allotments have been made for evaluation. Yet, this final step which really determines if the educational implications, and desired changes are really happening.

The program described will be heavily vested in building continuous ongoing evaluation which will serve to monitor the success of the students as well as the goals and objectives of that program.